

Spring 1-15-2009

ENG 3009G-003: Myth and Culture

William Searle
Eastern Illinois University

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Dr. William J. Searle

English 3009G—sec. 003—14:00 to 14:50—CH3691

Office Number: CH 3371 (CH 314B)

Office Phone: 581-6375; e-mail: wjsearle@eiu.edu

Office Hours: 12:00 to 12:50 MWF and Friday 3:00 to 3:50 and by appointment

The following texts are used for English 3009G:

William Buck. Trans. *Mahabharata*. New York, New York: Penguin/Meridian, 1987.

Alan Dundes. Editor. *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth*. Berkeley, California: U. of Cal. Press, 1984.

Richard Erdoes and Alfonse Ortiz. Editors. *American Indian Myths and Legends*. New York, New York: Random House/Pantheon, 1984.

Hermann Hesse. *Siddhartha*. Trans. By Gilda Rosner. New York, New York: Bantam, 1951, rpt. 1971.

John Neihardt. *Black Elk Speaks*. Lincoln, Nebraska: U. of Nebraska Press, 1932, rpt. 1979.

Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Trans. Rolfe Humphries. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana U. Press, 1953, rpt. 1983.

Nancy K. Sandars. Trans. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. New York, New York: Penguin, 1960, rpt. 1972.

Mary Shelley. *Frankenstein*. New York, New York: Signet, 1831, rpt. 1963.

Barbara C. Sproul. *Primal Myths: Creation Myths Around the World*. San Francisco, California: Harper Collins, 1991.

ATTENDANCE: Plan to attend every class. You might glance at page 55 of the 2006-2007 catalog concerning this matter. Obviously, a student seldom does well in a course when he or she cuts class frequently. For that reason, I have established the following attendance policy. For every five unexcused absences, your final grade will be lowered one letter grade. If you have ten unexcused absences, your final grade will be lowered two letter grades, etc. Late papers (exams, quizzes, etc.) will be accepted only in cases of extreme emergency—severe illness, official university activity, or other urgent reasons.

DEPARTMENTAL STATEMENT OF PLAGIARISM: “Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—‘The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one’s original work’ (*Random House*

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Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty up to and including the immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.”

GRADING: Approximately 20 percent of your grade will consist of class participation (class discussion, group work, etc.) and writing exercises (exclusive of out-of-class papers, like frequent reading check quizzes, etc.). More important, the classroom exercises, discussions, etc. will help you with exams and papers, the other eighty percent of your grade. There will be two one-hour exams, each worth 10 percent, and two short essays of a minimum of 1,000 words each (approximately 4 typewritten pages, double spaced) worth 20 percent apiece, and a final exam worth 20 percent. Of course, you are responsible for keeping up with reading and writing assignments, even if you are unable to attend class. In other words, a missed class is not an excuse for not being prepared on your return. Learn the assignment from a classmate or from your instructor. If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

CELL PHONES: Please keep them turned off and out of sight during class. For obvious reasons, please do not consult a cell phone during an exam.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: “Myth is a past with a future, exercising itself in the present,” writes contemporary Mexican author Carlos Fuentes. A constant among all peoples, a shared legacy of ancestral memories, perhaps a part of our very fiber, myth is, in part, the thread that binds a society (and societies) together, that which informs national identities and codes of moral conduct. So crucial are they, in fact, that people, even today, are willing to die for their myths.

Of course, we won’t go to that extent in our class. Our focus will be on the intersection between myth and culture as it is illustrated in some darn good reads. Anthropologists, psychologists, theologians, philosophers, literary theorists, etc. have all grappled with the term myth. So expect some treatment of theory and where appropriate (and accessible) application to Mediterranean, Eastern, and Modern mythologies. Our quest (just couldn’t resist that word) should reveal the essential beliefs of other cultures and at times their similarities with our own.

Class procedure will consist of very informal lecture and discussion periods, group work, and, when relevant, video. Grades will be based on class participation, occasional surprise reading check quizzes, two short papers, two one-hour exams, and a final.

A Very Tentative Outline for English 3009G

“The way to become truly human is to learn
to recognize the lineaments of God in all
the wonderful modulations in the face of man.
--Joseph Campbell, American Scholar of Myth

- Wk#1—Mon. Jan. 12—Discussion of course and assignment of texts.
Wed. “ 14—video, either *The Hero's Journey*, or, more probably,
An episode of either the *X-Files* or *BTVS*
Fri. “ 16—Group work on the video; grappling with the definition of
Myth; from *Sacred Narrative*, Lauri Honko's “The Problem of
Defining Myth,” pp. 41-52; J.W. Rogerson's “Slippery Words,
Myth,” pp. 62-71.

Unit #1: MEDITERRANEAN MYTHOLOGIES

“It's curious, and should be humbling, that ‘evolution
myths’ often foreshadow the dry ‘scientific findings’
of today. “
--Alexander Eliot, American Art Historian

- Wk #2—Mon. “ 19—NO CLASS—Martin Luther King's Birthday Observance.
Wed. “ 21—Begin Near Eastern Mythology: “The Enuma Elish,” pp. 99-113
In *Primal Myths*, quiz, handouts
Fri. “ 23—Conclude “Enuma Elish,” handout: Begin *The Epic of Gilgamesh*
pp. 61-96; remember there's a glossary at the back of the book.
Group work.

“A myth contains the story that is preserved in popular
memory and that helps to bring to life some deep stratum
buried deep in the depth of the human spirit.”
--Nickolai Berdyayev, Russian Philosopher

- Wk#3—Mon. “ 26—Epic of Gilgamesh, pp. 97-119, conclude GW. Handouts on
Genesis distributed.
Wed. “ 28—Judeo-Christian mythology; read chapters 1 and 2 of
Genesis and the introduction to those creation stories
in *Primal Myths*, pp. 123-126, handouts. Video *Who Wrote the
Bible?*
Fri. “ 30—loose ends of chapters 1 and 2
“Myth, especially as codified in religion, has been
the basis for the morality of a society.”
--J.F. Bierlien, American Scholar of Myth

- Wk #4—Mon. Feb. 2—excerpts from Genesis, chapters 3, 4, 6-9, video.
 Wed. “ 4—chapter 11 of Genesis; video on parallels between
 Mesopotamian myth and the Bible.
 Fri.Feb. 6—excerpts from Genesis, the Abraham story, chapters 12-25:8,
 Group work.

“In its fullest expression, the case for myth is universal;
 myth has a life of its own, and with its own spiritual resources,
 keeps finding clever ways of using every kind of human making
 to spread its potency.”

--Sean Kane, American Scholar of Myth

- Wk #5—Mon. “ 9—Abraham story concluded, quiz? Handout
 Wed. “ 11—Paper #1 assigned; Hesiod’s *Theogony* distributed.

Student conferences on essay #1 in my office (CH3371)
 for the next several weeks—MTWThF

Fri. “ 13— LINCOLNS’ BIRTHDAY OBSERVANCE—NO CLASS

“...we need myths to determine and to evaluate various
 facts presented to us. We need myths to answer the
 questions, ‘Who am I? How do I fit into the worlds of
 society and nature? How should I live?’”

--Barbara C. Sproul, American Scholar of Myth

- Wk #6—Mon. Feb. 16—excerpts from Hesiod’s *Theogony*, quiz? Handouts.
 Wed. “ 18—Conclude Hesiod’s *Theogony*
 Fri. “ 20—Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Book I, gw

“And the pervading purposes of our mythmaking ancestors,
 all down the centuries, has been to awaken us.”

--Alexander Eliot, American Art Historian

- Wk #7—Mon. “ 23—Conclude Book I, paper #1 due
 Wed. “ 25—excerpts from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, group work
 Fri. “ 27—Conclude group work; study guide for exam #1 distributed.

UNIT #2: EASTERN MYTHOLOGIES (HINDUISM, BUDDHISM)

“Myth, whether Christian or other, is a type of truth in the
 form of a story.”

--*Encyclopedia Britannica*

Wk #8—Mon. Mar. 2—Loose ends of Unit #1

Wed. “ 4—Introduction to Hinduism, selected myths from *Primal Myths*, pp. 179-192; handouts.

Fri. Mar. 6---Exam #1 (Mediterranean Mythologies)

“Myth embodies the nearest approach to truth that can be embodied in words.”

--A. K. Coomarswamy, Indian Philosopher

Wk #9—Mon. Mar 9—Exam #1 returned and discussed

Wed. “ 11—Paper # 1 returned; excerpts from the *Mahabharata* (MBH), Part I, video?

Fri. “ 13—excerpts from MBH, group work or video

SPRING RECESS—MARCH 14 THROUGH MARCH 22—NO CLASS

“Myths reveal the structure of reality, and the multiple modalities of being in the world; that is why they are exemplary models of human behavior.”

--Mircea Eliade, American Scholar of Myth

Wk #10—Mon. Mar. 23—excerpts from MBH, group work

Wed. “ 25—excerpts from MBH, video

Fri. “ 27—Paper #2 assigned.

Student conferences for paper #2 in my office, CH3371, MTWThF for several weeks.

“A myth is a symbolic story which demonstrates in Alan Watts’ words ‘the inner meaning of the universe and human life.’”

---Andrew Greeley, Priest and Novelist

Wk #11—Mon. Mar. 30—excerpts from MBH, group work

Wed. Apr. 1—excerpts from MBH, Part III, quiz, video

Fri. “ 3—conclude MBH.

“Accordingly, myth is here defined very broadly as a narrative (story) concerning fundamental symbols that are constitutive of or paradigmatic for human existence.”

--Bernard Batto, American Scholar of Religion

Wk #12—Mon. 6—Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, background, video, handouts

Wed. Apr. 8—Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, group work

Fri. “ 10—Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, study guide for exam #2 distributed.
 “Myths are regarded as a random collection of stories,
 in a culture there is a clear correlation between the
 distribution of mythic themes and what is considered
 socially relevant in that culture.”

--Lauri Honko, Finnish Folklorist

Wk #13—Mon. Apr. 13—Loose ends, Hesse’s *Siddhartha*

Wed. “ 15—Exam #2 (Eastern Mythologies)

Fri. “ 17—exam #2 returned; assignment of first 12 chapters
 of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, video documentary

UNIT #3: MODERN MYTHOLOGIES

“Certainly science, like so many of the earlier myths,
 appears to explain the natural world around us. But science
 can only answer how things happen; it is unable to tell us
why.” ---J. F. Bierli, American Scholar of Myth

Wk #14—Mon. “20—*Frankenstein*, graded group work

Wed. “ 22—Paper #2 due, *Frankenstein*, group work

Fri. “ 24—video, selected scenes

““You are my creature, but I am your master, obey.””

--Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*

Wk #15—Mon. “ 27—*Frankenstein*, graded group work

Wed. “ 29—*Frankenstein*, group work

Fri. May 1—Study Guide for the Final Exam distributed

FINAL EXAMS—May 4 THRU MAY 8 (EMPHASIS ON LATER WORKS)